(d) and (e) Government supports the objectives of SAARC which was established to promote economic, social and cultural cooperation as well as mutual understanding and strengthen collective self .reliance among the peoples of South Asia. Since its inception in 1985, SAARC has contributed to greater understanding, accommodation and information flow, which has led, first to a preferential trading arrangement (SAPTA), and subsequently to the signing of a Framework Agreement for free trade (SAFTA), currently under negotiation with a view to bringing it into force from January 1,2006. The Social Charter and conventions signed on issues such as trade, food security, terrorism, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for prostitution, and promotion of child welfare in South Asia offer instruments for Member States to formulate programmes and implement joint strategies in these key areas. People-to-people contact has also increased with NGOs and civil society playing a dynamic and incremental role in nurturing cooperation and activating ideas on economic, cultural, social and development objectives.

Meeting of Nepalese King with Indian Envoy

1755. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that King Gyanendra of Nepal, who has recently seized direct control of Nepal, has met envoys of key nations including India and U.S.;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the nature of talk he had with our envoy in Kathmandu;

(c) whether Government have decided to stop military aid to Nepal after the recent events; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Indian Ambassador in Nepal had an audience with King Gyanendra on February 9,2005. During the meeting, the Ambasador urged a return to democratic processes in Nepal at the earliest. He emphasized

the importance of bringing the political party leaders into a broad national consensus to enable Nepal to overcome the political and economic challenges confronting it. In this context, he called for immediate release of political leaders and lifting of restrictions on their constitutional rights and removal of censorship on media.

(c) and (d) Following the dismissal of the multi-party Government and imposition of emergency in Nepal on February 1,2005, the issue of military supplies to Nepal has been under continuous review taking into account the evolving situation in that country. In view of the current disturbed conditions in Nepal, no military supplies by Government of India have been delivered since February 1.

Shortage of skilled labour

†1756. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the need of skilled labours is being felt in certain industries after liberalization;

(b) if so, the names of these industries and the estimated shortage of skilled labour in each of them;

(c) whether it is also a fact that priority should be given to encourage their health, education and industrial training instead of making a law to increase their efficiency; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K CHANDRA SEKHAR RAO): (a) and (b) Industry needs skilled labourer, the requirement varies from time to time and from industry to industry. In order to provide skilled labour force as per need of the industry, Government is implementing skill-training programmes through various institutions.

(c) and (d) Health, education, industrial training and efficiency are equally important. Government is taking various steps to provide vocational training, skill upgradation of workers as well as promoting their health and education through various National Programmes.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.